

WYCOMBE Wanderers, regarded as one of the top sides in non-league football, suffered their greatest humiliation for many years on Saturday when they were bundled out of the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup by little Rothmans Hellenic Leaguers Hungerford Town — a major shock if ever there was one.

'Humiliation' is a strong word but used justifiably in this context. Wanderers were run off their feet in the second half and had no answer to Hungerford's busy and bustling style of play which earned them a place against Slough in the final on Easter Monday.

Wycombe, who have been giant-killers themselves in the past few years, now know

Hungerford Town 2, Wycombe Wanderers 1 REPORT BY MICHAEL KNOX

what it is like to be on the receiving end — and they will want to forget both the performance and the result as quickly as possible.

They will be keen to get back to the chase for the Rothmans Isthmian League championship but must improve by at least 10 times on this display if they are to pip Dagenham and Enfield at the end of the season.

Perhaps the most damning commentary of Wycombe's display was the sincere comment after the match from Hungerford manager George Pullin who said: "We didn't play as well as we can, especially in the first half. But we continued to work hard and it all came right in the end."

Hungerford are no strangers to cup giant-killing for at the same stage of last season's competition they knocked out Wycombe's Isthmian League neighbours Slough 1-0 before losing to Chesham in the final.

But Mr Pullin, who spent five years as a Wycombe player in the mid-sixties felt this was the better result. "We all regard Wycombe as one of the top non-league teams and this must be the greatest day in our club's history."

There will be inquests from all quarters on Wycombe's inept display — but two factors stand out. With a few notable exceptions the side lacked commitment and secondly — even more worrying — they failed in the simple basics of controlling and passing.

It is always difficult for a side of Wycombe's status to get 'geed up' for a contest against a small club in the heart of the Berkshire countryside, in what they consider to be a minor competition. They thought they could win by reputation alone and did not seem to exert themselves until the last five minutes when it was already too late.

The sloping pitch of rolled mud did not make control easy but it was nothing a little concentration would have put right. Even Paul Birdseye, normally

the most reliable of defenders, took his eyes off the ball on at least three occasions.

Apart from the admirable Ian Pearson, Blues were completely devoid of attacking ideas. No wonder Pearson hung on to the ball as long as he did for there was little constructive effort elsewhere.

NON-EXISTENT

Wycombe's mid-field was virtually non-existent. John Priestley won a few balls but then gave them away with poor distribution. Peter Cruse, back after two weeks of injury, faded badly in the second half while Mick Hollifield seems to have lost all confidence in his supreme ability.

It was often left to the back four to hoist up a high ball for the forwards to chase. But the home side's centre-backs of Alan Hamilton and Norman Matthews dealt with these comfortably.

The only time they were caught out came in the 21st minute when Wycombe took their expected lead. Pearson, who took all the dead-ball kicks on the right side of the field, floated a free-kick to the far post where Howard Kettleborough headed firmly past Pat Mooney.

The rest of the first half was virtually a non-event. Hungerford, clearly overawed, rarely put their game together while Wycombe lacked the drive and expertise to make the most of their opponents' shortcomings.

The signs that this might not be Wycombe's day came in the moments after the interval when Hungerford, playing down the considerable slope, started to stretch the visitors' defence. Only a fine save by Peter Spittle stopped Johnny Ashton, who had broken clear.

CAUTIONED

Hungerford appeared to have levelled matters in the 57th minute when Ashton netted following a goalmouth melee. But referee Angell, who left most of the decisions to his linesmen, acknowledged an off-side flag. Malcolm Williams was so strong in his protests that he was cautioned — again after consultation with a linesman.

But the Hellenic Leaguers were not to be denied and three minutes later Ingram made no mistake from the penalty spot after he himself had been brought down just inside the area.

Tony Horseman, who had contributed little, was substituted in the 76th minute by Dylan Evans but by this time Wycombe were coming under a good deal of pressure from their lively opponents, who were beginning to show the form that has made them leading contenders for the Hellenic Premier Division championship.

Nevertheless, the match appeared to be going into extra time, when in the 85th minute full-back Brian Faulkes turned up on the right wing. After beating Bobby Davies, he crossed into the middle. The ball was not cleared and Ingram gleefully drove it home to send reverberations all around the non-league soccer world.

HUNGERFORD: P. Mooney; B. Faulkes, S. Webb, A. Hamilton, N. Matthews, B. Cooper, D. Ingram, J. Kelman, M. Williams, C. Gwynn, J. Ashton, Sub. T. Swain (not used).

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips; J. Priestley, M. Hollifield, P. Cruse; H. Kettleborough, I. Pearson, A. Horseman (sub D. Evans 76 mins), Sub. J. Maskell (not used).

Referee: B. L. Angell (Reading).

Scorers: Hungerford — Ingram 2 (pen 60 mins, 85); Wycombe — Kettleborough (21).

'DISGRACEFUL', FUMES TED

TED Powell, the Wycombe Wanderers manager, was fuming after his side's shock defeat at Hungerford in the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup on Saturday.

Said the manager: "This was by far the worst performance given by Wycombe this season. I certainly let them know my feelings after the game."

"I won't tolerate the sort

of attitude shown by some of the players. It was disgraceful."

The Blues' defeat is the first occasion they have failed to qualify for the final of the Senior Cup since the season 1969-70 when they were beaten by Maidenhead United in an earlier round.

For the last seven years they have reached the final although last season they withdrew after fielding an ineligible player in the semi-final.

Hungerford, finalists last year, now go on to meet Slough Town on Easter Monday. The venue has yet to be confirmed, but Wycombe's Loakes Park ground is favourite.